

**The Future of NAITTE:
Honoring the Past, Understanding the Present,
Embracing the Future**

Mary Jo Self
Oklahoma State University

As I prepared this response to Charles Gagel's 2006 article recapping and comparing the 1993 and 2004 surveys of the National Association of Industrial and Technical Teacher Educators (NAITTE) membership, I approached the task based on a limited number of years of experience with the NAITTE organization. In the late 1990s, when I was a graduate student at Oklahoma State University, I joined NAITTE and was fortunate to be able to present my dissertation at the graduate student research symposium. After I began my higher education career in the fall of 2000, my adviser encouraged me to continue my activities in the organization in order to become involved in our profession and to network with others in the field. Since that time, I have remained an active NAITTE member, serving on the research committee and most recently, beginning a two-year service as president-elect. I fully appreciate and respect those who had a vision for NAITTE at its inception as well as the many who later worked to continue that vision. I acknowledge the service as teacher educators our profession provides, recognize the need for the teachers we produce, and understand the value of the programs that career and technical education offers. With that respect and admiration in mind, the following comments are intended not to criticize but to prod us to think about our future as an organization

The Past, Present, and Future of NAITTE

To say that we live in times of change is an understatement. We are constantly bombarded with changes including new methods of communication, new forms of technology, and an ever increasing amount of information to

Self is Assistant Professor in the Department of Occupational Education at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Self can be reached at maryjo.self@okstate.edu.

manage. Much literature has been written about managing change and preparing both ourselves and others for the developments that will confront us in the future. We are in the business of education, which is fundamentally about change; change in knowledge level, change in attitudes, change in practice, and change in skill development. As educators, can we model for our students and teachers the very attributes we attempt to encourage in them?

John F. Kennedy once said, "Change is the law of life and those who look only to the *past* or *present* are certain to miss the *future*." As we contemplate both the 1993 and 2004 membership surveys of NAITTE members, we should ask ourselves a few questions: What are the characteristics of the *past* we should honor? What can we learn from the *present*? What parts of the *future* should we embrace?

First, let's examine the past and the 69-year history of NAITTE. The organization has a proud history of providing services to its members. Also throughout its history, its members have served and continue to serve the profession with distinction. Traditions such as the ITE Directory, the *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education (JITE)*, the officer installation ceremony, and the breakfast and business meeting are clearly a respected and strong part of NAITTE's history. Participants in the 2004 survey indicated a strong affiliation in particular with the *Journal*, which provides an opportunity for teacher education faculty members to submit manuscripts to a journal which is closely tied to their areas of interest.

Second, a clear picture of the present is needed. Change should never be initiated for its own sake. Brookfield (1995) and other scholars encourage us to become critically reflective practitioners who look at the data as objectively as possible and evaluate a variety of alternatives. Are these not the very practices we strive to instill in students in our classes? Looking at the data collected in the 2004 NAITTE survey and the report by Gagel (2006), the present state of the organization can be reflected in these summary points:

- Membership continues to decline from a high of 702 in 1973 to 182 at the time of the 2004 study,

- The majority of members continue to be teacher educators,
- Fifty-two percent of the members participate as “general members only” without involvement in any NAITTE sponsored activities at the annual conference,
- Serious questions continue concerning the appropriateness of the name of the organization, the mission of the organization, and the seeming inability to involve members at a high level in the organization.

Other points can be gleaned from Gagel’s work. The overall picture is a tradition-bound organization with declining membership and a declining number of potential members. Though not to the point of consensus, many members indicate a need for a change in name, mission, and focus in order to sustain the organization into the future.

Lastly, like those who founded NAITTE, to embrace the future, we must possess a strong vision. While maintaining a healthy respect for the past, we must not remain stagnant or glued to it. We must not allow the comfort of continuing to do what we have always done prevent us from making necessary changes in our practice. The saying I often use with students is a common one: “If we keep doing what we always have been doing, we will keep getting what we have always been getting.” If we were teaching today using the same curriculum content that was taught in 1937 when NAITTE was formed and using the same instructional methodologies, we would be considered outdated. But yet, in many ways, the organization of NAITTE is still functioning in that 1937 mode. Just as we would not be content to communicate, teach, or travel in a 70-year old style, we should not expect an organization to be viable and continue to thrive using an outdated model.

In order to identify the necessary changes, we must retain the ability to communicate freely in an open environment. Informally at our recent national meeting, I approached several individuals to discuss with them pressing issues of our membership. In some instances, those talks were candid and open. However, on other occasions, I sensed hesitation and even opposition to discussing whether or not NAITTE was meeting the

needs of its membership. Are we afraid to keep pace with the times? If we are to construct a vision for our future, we must hold frequent discussions with the entire NAITTE membership, not just department chairs, and those discussions must be frank and honest. Acknowledging a need to change for the future is not a statement that the past has failed in some way; rather that the future demands a different response.

Points to Ponder

A different response for the future of NAITTE involves evaluating the ideas mentioned above as well as pursuing open discussions of the points which follow.

Consolidation with Similar Organizations

We should address the possibility of merging NAITTE with other organizations that have similar goals. Only honest discussion and consideration of the benefits and challenges such consolidation or merger might bring can determine if this move would be advantageous. Do we lose potential influence because we are so fragmented? Can we establish a group of professionals who can speak with one voice while still maintaining their own parts? Certainly we need as strong a voice as possible in the arenas in which we work. We don't have the luxury of only singing the one verse to our own favorite song.

In the last year or so, the Academy for Career and Technical Teacher Education (ACTTE) has been formed and has experienced solid growth with a more inclusive nature. This group is also sponsoring a popular research conference the day prior to the national meeting. Rather than wait for ACTE to make changes in the national meeting, this group has forged ahead with a pre-conference devoted entirely to research. Could NAITTE co-sponsor such an event? What discussions need to be held with other similar organizations and in what format? It is interesting to note that per the ACTE Wire Mailbox for the 2006 ACTE convention in Atlanta, other groups such as High Schools that Work, MarkEd and Global Skills X-Change will be joining ACTE as partners in the national meeting.

Consolidation might assist us in other purely practical ways. As it is now, many of us belong to so many organizations we

are pressed to list them all and certainly to pay the membership dues to all of them! While we may have good intentions to participate more fully than just listing the organization on our vita, job and personal demands may far exceed our time and energy resources. Rather than bemoan the fact that we have more to do with less time to do it, we need to work smart. Frequently I tell teachers in class to find ways to work smarter, not longer. The same advice holds merit for our organization.

Continuation of Publications

Continuance of the *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education* should be a priority. Clearly, the most popular of all services provided to NAITTE members, the *Journal* provides a forum for discussions (such as this one) about our future as well as an opportunity for faculty members to publish their works. The *Journal* would benefit from even more submissions of quality manuscripts. As referenced in the membership survey, the preference of the members is to continue publishing four *Journal* issues a year with the possibility of changing to an electronic format with one complete volume printed per year. George Rogers, a past editor of *JITE*, dedicated one issue for graduate students. Janet Burns, the current editor, welcomes any suggestions and improvements members might suggest. Have you recently submitted a manuscript to *JITE*? Have you volunteered to serve as a reviewer? Have you made a manuscript submission to a refereed journal a requirement of a graduate-level course you might be teaching? In the last two years, I have required students in our occupational education philosophy core course in our Ph.D. degree program to prepare one of their manuscripts for submission to an appropriate journal. I have found this to be very helpful to the students as evidenced by their comments on course evaluations. Helping our graduate students learn how to find an appropriate refereed journal, prepare a manuscript, live through the waiting period before learning if it is to be published or not, make the revisions, and hopefully to see their own work in print is a valuable way to 'grow our own'.

Use of electronic formats for both the ITE Directory and the "News and Views" seems to be popular. In what ways can we

minimize the chance of incorrect e-mails so that these valuable tools can reach the membership?

Organizational Changes

Examination of our name, current mission statement, and organizational structure needs to be addressed soon. The data contained in Gagel's tables tell the story of an organization where respondents are questioning the appropriateness of our name (Table 7) and our mission statement (Table 8) (Gagel, 2006). Discussion concerning possible name and mission statement changes should to be held with all demographic groups represented by the membership. In what ways should this examination be held? How can we ensure all groups are represented?

In Table 17, Gagel (2006) summarized the survey respondents' preferences for extending the transformation discussion to the membership. Nearly 40% favored a membership-wide e-list service, 30.2% expressed interest in a dedicated journal issue, and 22.6% recommended a members-only web site. Perhaps a graduate student or faculty member could pursue this issue as a research project. In addition to determining the attitudes of the NAITTE membership regarding the future transformation of the organization, it would be interesting to interview new members of our profession who have not chosen to join NAITTE and discover their knowledge level of our organization.

We should carefully analyze our officer formation and determine whether or not the work load is evenly distributed. From conversations with former officers of NAITTE, it appears that the work load is disproportionate among the officers, with the membership chair and circulation chair bearing, along with the president, the major responsibilities. What is the function of the vice-presidents other than to represent a particular area of our field?

Conclusion

Certainly this list is not exhaustive and as the process continues, other areas of concern will arise and require attention. In the past the professionals in our field have risen to challenges

to keep pace with the times. Can we do it again? I believe the answer is “yes,” but it will require time and effort and a passionate commitment to our profession. Recently as my daughters and I toured the sights of Washington, D.C., we visited the Thomas Jefferson Memorial. There, etched in marble, is this quote that befits our discussion: “. . . institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind as that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change. With the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times...”

References

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